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!!Warning!!

E-mail is as private as the company bulletin board.
If you'd be embarrassed to see your message posted on the bulletin board, don't put it out electronically.

When To Use E-Mail

Electronic mail is a wonderful tool, and it is changing our professional and personal communication patterns. But e-mail isn't always the best communication channel. Sometimes it pays to pick up the phone. Other times, it's better to use your favorite pen and write a note by hand. So, when should you use e-mail? Here are a few guidelines. Use it when:

- You need to get data from the message or an attached document into another person's computer.

- You are in different time zones and/or are contacting someone who is hard to reach by phone or in person.

- Your message is short and informal.

- You want to send the same message to several people within a short time.

- You don't need a printed record of your correspondence.

- You want to stop a round of "phone-tag."

- You want to minimize long-distance telephone charges.

- You are providing follow-up information, not making an initial contact.

How To Create Effective Messages

Once you've decided that it's appropriate to send an e-mail message, how do you make sure it's effective? After all, most people receive between 15 and 50 electronic mail messages a day; some receive 100 or more! Yours is just one more to wade through (yes, even if you are the boss!). To help your messages get through:

- Always fill in the subject header line. Keep it punchy and short.

- Make sure you have typed in the correct e-mail address.

• Send your message only to those who really need to read it (i.e., don't copy the whole office just because you already have everyone on a mailing list and you're in a hurry).

• Put a friendly opening and the person's name on the first line.

• When replying to a message, add the applicable part of the sender's original message or specifically refer to its contents. They need to know what you're responding to.

• Limit your message to the equivalent of one screen page. If you need more room, put the rest in an attached file.

• Don't get exotic visually. Use a common typeface that will display well on everyone's computer (e.g., Times Roman).

• There are hundreds of emoticons (little sideways "pictures" drawn using various keyboard characters) and abbreviations used as shorthand in cyberspace (e.g., IMHO = in my humble opinion). Don't use them in your corporate e-mail unless you are absolutely certain all of your recipients will understand them. Even then, use them sparingly — they are still considered "cute" and "techie." They will detract from your message.

• Don't use ALL CAPS. They are hard to read and using them is considered the equivalent of shouting at someone in cyberspace.

• Be professional. All the rules of good writing apply to e-mail. Be as careful with your grammar, punctuation, paragraph formation, and spelling as you would in a printed memo on company letterhead.

• Request a specific action or response within a set time frame. If no response or action is needed, write a sentence like, "no response needed."

• Close with a personal, friendly sentence.

• Include your name, company, telephone number, and e-mail address at the end of your message.

• Do your part to keep your network manager happy. Don't use e-mail to just say, "Hi." Clean your "in" and "sent" boxes regularly. If you need to keep multiple versions of a file, archive offline everything except the most recent version.

A Final Hint

Create a signature file so your contact information will be generated automatically with every outgoing message.